

AGAIN I SAY REJOICE!

Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

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Preface

Philippians was written by Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome. Even though Acts 28 tells us he was in a relatively comfortable situation in his own rented house, being chained to a guard, and not able to come and go and carry out his ministry was a grievous experience for Paul. Yet, his most optimistic positive letter was written under these circumstances. In this he personified so much of what he taught in this epistle. Contentment, joy, hope, and peace were his. What might his guards have thought of him and his teaching?

In Philippians we have much of the mind of Paul as he personified the mind of Christ. He tells of his personal feelings toward the Philippian Christians, his joy that the gospel was being preached even by those who wanted hardships to come to him. He told of his days of want and his days of abundance, of the times when he experienced disappointment and when he was elated. But he also tells us that he has learned the secret of contentment. The theology of Philippians is challenging. Paul expresses a complex Christology, but answers none of our curious questions about the subject.

In this booklet there is considerable space devoted to the study of selected Greek words. The Greek language was a fine theological language, and it is very picturesque in many of its words. When translated into other languages, these shades of meaning are frequently lost or are less prominent simply because there are no exact equivalents in other languages. By looking at the Greek words these interesting sidelights of meanings can be seen, and they greatly increase our appreciation and understanding of the text. However, one need not know the Greek language to make these studies. There are numbers of sources for the reader who is not familiar with Greek. In the Bibliography some of these are listed. Give special attention to books by Barclay, Mounce, Robertson, and Vine. Although it takes extra effort to become familiar with this area of study, it will prove to be exceedingly useful in understanding the text as well as enhancing our teaching and preaching.

This is one of Paul's shorter epistles. It is a letter for today. Its tone is positive, its message is practical, and its tone is inspiring.

Introduction to Philippians

Introduction:

1. The book of Philippians is one of Paul's Prison Epistles. He wrote a number of epistles while in prison in Rome, and it is generally supposed that it was during his Roman imprisonment that he wrote this letter. See the section below dealing with the imprisonments.
2. Although there were some problems addressed in this letter it is generally very positive, and the Philippian church is considered one of the most problem free churches to which Paul wrote.
3. His writing is very personal and pastoral. This was the first church which Paul established in Europe.

I. The city of Philippi.

A. The geography of Philippi.

1. The city was located in the eastern portion of Macedonia, the northern part of Greece. It was located on a plain about eight miles inland from the Aegean Sea, but it was enclosed by mountains
2. An important east-west highway called the *Via Egnatia* ran through the city. This was a military and commercial highway which connected Rome with the eastern provinces of the Empire.

B. History of Philippi.

1. The city was established about 357-356 B.C. by Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great.
2. According to the Greek historian Diodorus, a very small settlement was first established about 361 B.C. by immigrants who came from Thasos, an island located just offshore. They first called the settlement Krenides, but when Philip II came into power he enlarged the settlement, brought a large number of inhabitants into it, and established it as a city rather than just a settlement. He then gave it his own name.
3. In 167 B.C., after Rome had come into power, the area of Macedonia was divided into four districts, and Philippi was part of the first district.
4. Brutus assassinated Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. Two years later Brutus and Cassius led their army to Philippi where they engaged Antony and Octavian in the famous Battle of Philippi. Brutus and Cassius were defeated.
5. About 30 B.C., in order to provide a place for his soldiers to live near Rome, Octavian, then ruler of Rome, moved a large group of Italians from their homes.
 - a. They were taken to Philippi where they settled, and the city was given the status of a Roman Colony.

- b. In 27 B.C. the Romans Senate gave Octavian the designation of “Augustus” and he became Rome’s first emperor. He was the adopted son of Julius Caesar.
- 6. Octavian saw the importance of Philippi as a military base and a source of revenue. Abundant gold deposits had been discovered in the area of Thrace during the time of Philip of Macedon (about 360 B.C.) and it had provided considerable income for the Greeks and later for the Romans.
 - a. Thrace became a large Roman province bordering Macedonia, just north of Philippi. Octavian (Caesar Augustus) saw that Philippi could be an outstanding commercial and military base. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and Amphipolis was the capital of the district in which Philippi was located.
 - b. Philippi became a Roman military colony and the center of a large populated area with suburbs and small towns all around it.

C. Philippi as a Roman Colony.

- 1. Philippi is the only city which Luke characterizes as a colony (Latin, *coloniae*). As a Roman colony its inhabitants had many of the civil rights and privileges enjoyed by citizens of Rome itself. This was different from the *municipia* or ordinary cities of the empire. A colony was frequently referred to as a “miniature Rome” because its governmental officials had a great deal of autonomy in decision making and land usage. Much of the architecture of Roman colonies resembled that of Rome itself.
- 2. Citizens of a colony received certain individual privileges. Two of these were especially important.
 - a. Its citizens could own property and pass it down to their heirs. This exempted owners from certain taxes which were paid by others.
 - b. There were legal privileges and right relating to arrest and civil lawsuits.

D. Archaeological discoveries in Philippi.

- 1. Between 1914 and 1938 French archaeologists conducted a variety of excavations in Philippi.
- 2. Some of the results of these excavations were:
 - a. The discovery of the Forum, located on the *Via Egnatia*.
 - b. Unearthing two temples, one of which was the temple of Silvanus, one of the gods of the Romans. He was thought of as a household god and the god of plantations. He was also supposed to have been the protector of the empire and of the emperor himself. Two images of Silvanus were discovered.
 - c. Among the discoveries at Philippi were the names of persons who are familiar in Acts and the Pauline epistles. Some of these were Secundus (Acts 20:4), Crescens (II Tim. 4:10), Trophimus (II Tim. 4:20), and Pudens (II Tim. 4:21).

II. Paul at Philippi.

A. “The Macedonian Call.”

1. After the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return to visit the churches they had established on their first mission tour. Because of the dispute over whether or not to take Mark with them, Paul separated from Barnabas and took Silas with him.
 - a. Paul and Silas went to Lystra where Timothy joined them. The trio then went to Troas.
 - b. While at Troas Paul had the vision of a man from Macedonia asking him to “Come over into Macedonia and help us.” Acts 16:9.
 - c. The “we” sections of Acts begin here, indicating that Luke joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy.
2. Although their ship landed in Neapolis, the party moved about eight miles along the *Via Egnitiae* to Philippi. So far as we know this became the first city of Europe to hear the gospel. However, Acts 2:10 mentions that “sojourners from Rome” were present at Pentecost. Upon their return to Rome, they may very well have become the nucleus for beginning the church in the city of Rome.
3. Acts 16:12 mentions that Philippi was a Roman Colony and that it was the first city of the district.
 - a. Amphipolis, not Philippi was the capital city of the district.
 - b. The phrase, “first (leading) city of the district” may refer to the fact that Philippi was one of the most important cities in the district from a military and commercial point of view. History shows that the people of Philippi sometimes considered it as such.
4. In looking at the books of Philippians and Acts, we have the names of a few of the Christians there: Lydia and her household (Acts 16:15), Epaphraditus (Phil. 2:25), Euodia, Syntyche (Phil. 4:2), and Clement (Phil. 4:3).
 - a. These names indicate that the church was probably a Gentile church.
 - b. This is reinforced by the fact that Paul only briefly mentions the difficulties of Judaizing teachers there.
5. Three events characterized Paul’s stay in Philippi. The conversion of Lydia and her household (Acts 16:13-15), the encounter with the woman with the spirit of divination (*πυθων* — *puthōn*) (Acts 16:16-18) and the conversion of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:19-34).

B. The conversion of Lydia and her household.

1. Presumably there were not as many as ten Jewish families or perhaps ten male Jews in Philippi since the general practice was to begin a synagogue if ten families (or males) were residents of a city and were willing to establish a synagogue.

- a. On the Sabbath day a group met at the riverside which was referred to as “a place of prayer.”
- b. Paul went there on the Sabbath and encountered a group of women.
- 2. Lydia was from Thyatira, and was a “worshipper of God.” This probably meant that she was a proselyte to the Jewish religion.
- 3. Acts 16:14-15 completes her conversion saying that she and her household were baptized.

C. The woman with the spirit of divination.

- 1. A slave girl, who is referred to as a soothsayer or fortune-teller, followed the missionary group as they were on their way to the place of prayer.
- 2. The Greek phrase (*πνευμα πυθων* — *pneuma puthōn*), is variously translated as a “spirit of divination” (ASV), “a spirit by which she predicted the future” (NIV), or “oracular spirit” (NEB).
 - a. The “spirit of python,” as a designation of a soothsayer, originally applied only to those who followed the god Apollo at Delphi, but the expression was later used to refer to any soothsayer.
 - b. The python was the snake symbol by which Apollo was identified.
- 3. She followed the missionary party proclaiming that “these men are servants of the Most High God who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”
 - a. The expression, “the way of salvation” used by the slave girl would not necessarily have been referring to the gospel, because it was a common phrase among the pagans.
 - b. Paul cast the spirit out of her, and her owners saw that their business was thus destroyed. They seized Paul and Silas and brought them before the magistrates, charging them as Jews who were promoting customs which were not lawful for Romans to practice.
 - c. The Jewish religion was licensed in the Roman Empire, but even a licensed religion was not permitted to proselytize since that violated the cult of the Emperor. Paul and Silas were put in prison

D. The conversion of the jailer.

- 1. The Roman citizen status of Paul, and perhaps Silas was violated when they were imprisoned, beaten and placed in stocks without the opportunity of a hearing and defense.
- 2. The incident of the earthquake gave rise to the gospel being presented to the jailer and his household, and their subsequent conversion.

3. When the magistrates ordered the release of Paul and Silas they protested citing the violation of their Roman citizenship. Since this was a serious violation, the magistrates took great pains to apologize for their error and released Paul and Silas.

III. The authorship of Philippians.

A. Internal evidence.

1. The genuineness of Philippians is generally recognized by conservative and liberal scholars alike.
 - a. It claims to have been written by Paul and Timothy (1:1) and there is nothing in the contents which would speak against this.
 - b. The writer shows a personal acquaintance with the church, calling some of its members by name, and addressing situations with which Paul would have been acquainted. See 1:3-5, 2:12-13, 2:19, 2:25, 4:2, 4:10-20, and others.
2. The letter has the general character of a personal letter which would not have been the case if it were a forgery.

B. External evidence. The patristic evidence is very strong. The letter is alluded to, quoted, and identified by various writers.

1. The following early writers (two of whom were considered heretics) allude to the letter or mention it.
 - a. Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 115).
 - b. Marcion (A.D. 140) a heretic.
 - c. Polycarp of Smyrna (A.D. 69-150).
 - d. Justin (A.D. 100-165).
 - e. Origen (A.D. 185-254).
 - f. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 190).
 - g. Tertullian (A.D. 160-240), a heretic.
2. The following also mention or allude to it.
 - a. Didache (A.D. 120).
 - b. Muratorian Canon (A.D. 157-170).

IV. Place and date of composition.

- #### A. Place of composition. Three possible places of composition have been advocated by various scholars. Paul wrote this letter from prison, but since he was imprisoned a number of times the question arises, from which city (or prison) did he write this letter? Three different cities have been advocated. They are Caesarea, Ephesus, and Rome. We will take these in order.

1. Caesarea: Arguments favoring this location.
 - a. Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea for two years, giving ample time to communicate with the Philippian church.
 - b. It would be strange to suppose that for that entire period Paul did no writing.
 - c. In Caesarea he was not in serious danger, and this is shown in the contents of Philippians.
2. Caesarea: Arguments against this location.
 - a. In 2:24 Paul says he expects to come to see them shortly. However, in Caesarea, he was expecting to go to Rome for trial before Caesar's court, not to be released to go to Philippi.
 - b. In 1:13 he mentions the Praetorian Guard, and in 4:22 he mentions Caesar's household, neither of which fit Caesarea.
3. Ephesus: Arguments favoring this location.
 - a. Paul speaks of having fought against the beasts in Ephesus, probably alluding to an imprisonment. See I Cor. 15:32.
 - b. He also tells us of some of his strife in Ephesus, possibly meaning that he was in prison in that city. See II Cor. 1:8-10 and 11:23. The Corinthian correspondence was written while Paul was in Ephesus.
 - c. In Philippians Paul indicates that there had been frequent contacts between himself and the Philippian church. The proximity of Philippi to Ephesus makes this much more likely than the distance between Philippi and either Rome or Caesarea.
4. Ephesus: Arguments against this location.
 - a. Arguments favoring Rome militate against both Caesarea and Ephesus as possible places of origin.
 - b. Although Acts tells us of problems in Ephesus, including the riot, there is no evidence of an Ephesian imprisonment
5. Rome: Arguments favoring this location.
 - a. The writer mentions the Praetorian Guard and Caesar's household, giving the letter a distinctive Roman sound.
 - b. The church conflicts in 1:12-18 fit the Roman situation, but do not fit either Ephesus or Caesarea.
 - c. His desire to make the gospel known even as a prisoner fits Rome well, but not Ephesus or Caesarea. See Phil. 1:-8, 1:12-14.
6. Rome: Arguments against this location.

- a. The trip from Rome to Philippi is about 800 miles, and goes against the fact that the writer mentions some rather frequent contacts with the Philippian church.
- b. In Philippians Paul tells them he wants to return to them, but in Romans he speaks of his desire to go to Spain not Phlippi. This assumes that Paul would be going to Rome on his own rather than as a prisoner.

Outline of Philippians

Introduction 1:1-11

1. Salutation. 1:1-2
2. Thanksgiving and prayer. 1:3-11

I. Paul's experience in prison and its effect. 1:12-30

- A. Thing that had happened to him. 1:12-14
- B. Bad motives and good motives for preaching the gospel. 1:15-18a
- C. The results and Paul's attitude toward life. 1:18b-26
- D. What others can learn from Paul's experience and his observations. 1:27-30

II. The basis of the Christian life. 2:1-18

- A. Personal godliness. 2:1-4.
- B. Christology and personal godliness. 2:5-11
- C. Putting it into practice. 2:12-18

III. Timothy and Epaphroditus. 2:19-30

- A. Commendations in behalf of Timothy. 2:19-24
- B. The situation with Epaphroditus. 2:25-30

IV. Warnings of dangers confronting the church, and true confidence. 3:1—4:1

- A. The dangers of depending on the flesh. 3:1-11
- B. What is dependable? A view of the past and a dependable future. 3:12-16
- C. Work for consistence in the Christian life. 3:17—4:1

V. Final exhortations. 4:2-9

- A. An admonition for two women and an appeal to help them. 4:2-3
- B. The joy of the Christian life. 4:4-9

VI. Gratitude for the generosity of the Philippians. 4:10-20

VII. Final greetings. 4:21-23

Philippians – An Overview

Introduction, salutation and prayer. 1:1-11

1. This letter shows the marks of an ordinary personal letter sent to the church in Philippi. For the most part Paul does not speak of doctrinal errors in the church, but expresses his joy at their faithfulness and response to his personal needs. However, there were some problems which Paul addresses.
2. He addresses the letter to the saints, together with the overseers and deacons. This is the only one of Paul's letters which in so addressed. Other than this, the salutation is Paul's customary greeting. Timothy joins him in writing the letter.
3. Paul then reminds them that they are the constant subjects of his prayers of thanksgiving, and he remembers them with joy. The words joy and rejoice are key in this letter. The Philippians have shared with him in his problems and imprisonment, and he reaffirms his affection for them, and continues to pray for them.
4. The Philippian church had helped Paul on a number of occasions, and he expresses his gratitude to them for this.

I. Paul's experience in prison, and its effect. 1:12-30

- A. Paul now speaks about “what happened to me,” no doubt referring to his imprisonment, saying that it has resulted in the gospel being preached more vigorously. The entire Praetorian Guard (probably the palace guard) knows about his situation. Possibly the Philippian church either had no information or misinformation concerning his situation so he tells them about these events in order to clarify things. Instead of his imprisonment hindering the gospel it has helped.
- B. Some of those proclaiming the gospel however were doing so with less than pure motives such as envy and rivalry, while others are taking the gospel to others through love and goodwill. The important thing is that the gospel is being preached, and this is cause for rejoicing.
- C. Paul further believes that through their prayers and the help of the Spirit he will be delivered from his problems. He wants Christ to be exalted in his life however whether it means through life or death. Paul states that he really believes it would be better for him to die and be with the Lord, but for him to remain and minister to others is more beneficial. Whatever might be his fate, he is ready for it. He is confident that they also will continue in faith, and contend for the gospel.

II. The basis of the Christian life. 2:1-18

- A. There is no substitute for personal godliness. He sees their compassion, unity and love, and says he rejoices in it, encouraging them toward even higher goals.
- B. The basis of all of this is the development of attitudes emulating the humility of Christ. “Have this mind in you.” Next follows the hymn. This contains some important Christological information. Because of the difference in tone, syntax, and grammar, some

scholars consider this to be a hymn familiar to them, and possibly used in their worship, but this is speculation.

1. This block is in the form of poetry.
 2. First, Paul says that Christ was in the “form of God.” The Greek says **εν μορφῃ θεου**. (*en morphē theou*). The key word here is **μορφῇ** (*morphē*) meaning the essence of, or of the substance of.
 - a. The English word ‘form’ is commonly understood to mean ‘shape,’ or ‘sensible appearance.’
 - b. **Μορφῇ** (*morphē*) here the essential nature and character of God, and which reveals it.” (Marvin R. Vincent, *International Critical Commentary, The Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 57-58) Paul further states that Christ did not consider this something to be grasped, such as a prize, but he emptied himself.
 3. The Greek expression here is **αλλα εαυτον εκενωσεν** (*alla eauton ekenōsen*). The word **εκενωσεν** (*ekenōsen*) is from the word **κενωω** (*kenoō*) which means to completely evacuate or empty. In this statement Paul affirms the totality of Christ’s renunciation of his divine prerogatives and essence.
 4. The next statement says that “he took for form of a servant.” The Greek phrase is **μορφην δουλου λαβων** (*morphēn doulou labōn*).
 - a. Literally this translates, “having taken the form of a slave.” Notice again the use of the word **μορφην** referring to his essence.
 - b. The idea is that Christ, who was in his very essence God, did not count that exalted position a prize to be seized, or eagerly grasped. The Greek word here is **αρπογμον** (*harpogmon*). Instead, Christ completely abdicated this position by emptying himself totally, taking instead the very essence of a slave.
 - c. He was seen on earth as a man, a very humble laboring man. He did this voluntarily – “he humbled himself.” He had both the essence (**μορφῇ** –*morphē*) of man and the appearance (**σχημα** – *schēma*) of man. That is, he was, in fact, just as human as any other man. Thus, Jesus had the very essence of God, but emptied himself of this, and took on himself the very essence of humanity. His humility and obedience were complete for he became absolutely obedient to God, even to the point of death.
 - d. The consequence of this was his exaltation to the right hand of God, and ultimately “every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”
- C. Paul admonishes the Philippians to imitate this attitude. They should shine as stars in the universe of darkness, do everything without complaining, in this crooked and depraved world.

III. The situation of Timothy and Epaphroditus. 2:19-30.

- A. At this point there is an interruption in thought as Paul speaks of the situation with his two companions.
 - 1. He hoped to send his trusted friend Timothy to tell them of his own condition, and in turn, receive information concerning them.
 - 2. Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippian church to assist Paul, and he felt it was important that he be sent back.
- B. Epaphroditus had been sick, but was concerned that the Philippians were worrying too much about his health.

IV. Paul gave warnings concerning dangers which may confront the church. In this section he addresses some problems in the church at Philippi. 3:1—4:1

- A. It is not clear who is being referred to as “the dogs” unless the next phrase describes them, “those men who do evil.”
- B. Paul refers to the Judaizers when he speaks of those “mutilators of the flesh” because this is what they were known for in their advocacy of circumcision.
 - 1. As a mark of Israel’s covenant with God, great confidence was placed on circumcision. Paul then uses the figure of circumcision to say that Christians are the true heirs of that covenant.
 - 2. Therefore, we are the ones who are the true “circumcision” because we worship by the Spirit of God and we glory in Christ Jesus. We put no confidence in being fleshly descendants of Abraham.
- C. Ancestry could have been a source of pride for Paul, so he goes through his own pedigree to illustrate it.
 - 1. Instead of placing his confidence in this he says that his hope is in Christ Jesus, and at the time of the Parousia he wants to be found in Christ, not pleading his case on the basis of his own righteousness, not even that which comes from observing law, but that which comes through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 2. His goal is to move in this direction, so he presses on toward this goal, encouraging all mature Christians to do the same.
 - 3. He tearfully regrets to tell them that there are some people who are enemies of Christ Jesus, and they will pay a dear price for their opposition.
 - a. This may refer to civil or governmental people or entities because he follows it by stating that the Christian’s commonwealth is in heaven, not on earth.
 - b. Notice that he uses the present tense not the future. That is, our true country and our ultimate allegiance *is* (not “will be”) heaven.
 - c. Since Philippi was a Roman colony its people were keenly aware of the power and prestige of Rome and they took great pride in being Romans. But Christians, in a real sense are strangers or aliens in this world.

V. Paul's final exhortations. 4:2-9

- A. He encourages two women to settle their differences in the Lord, also mentioning Clement.
 - 1. In the late first and early second century there was a Christian in Rome by the name of Clement whose writings are still extant. These constitute the earliest post New Testament writings we have.
 - 2. Some have tried to identify this man with the person Paul mentions here, but we must remember that this name was common, and there is no concrete evidence that this reference to Clement is to be identified with Clement of Rome. Origen (182-251) tried to identify him as such, but scholars have generally abandoned this position.
- B. Paul encourages the Philippian Christians by telling them to continue to rejoice in the Lord, think of things which are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable.

VI. He expresses gratitude for their concern and gifts, recounting the fact that he has been in difficult circumstances, but has learned to be content in each of them. 4:10-20

VII. Final greetings. 4:21-23

- A. He sends his own final greeting, along with the greetings from Caesar's household.
 - 1. The expression "Caesar's household" was at one time thought to have referred to converts within the royal household of Rome. Although some of this took place in the second and third centuries and later, at the time Paul wrote there is no evidence of such conversions.
 - 2. Later research has shown that Caesar's household can refer to civil or imperial workers of almost any rank.
- B. In ancient days some were spoken of as eating at the king's table. This did not refer to dining with him, but that they were supplied food from the king's treasury.
 - 1. This generalization may also apply here.
 - 2. Since Philippi had been repopulated with former soldiers in Philip's army, it is probable that some of the converts at Philippi occupied such governmental positions and would understand this expression.

The Gospel is Not Chained

Phil 1:1-30

1:1-2. “Grace and peace to you.”

The salutation is the basic type of epistolary greeting used in the ancient world. There was some variety in such greetings, but in general they consisted of the writer’s introduction of himself by name, followed by a statement of relationship, a statement of the addressee by name, and frequently a wish or statement of a desire for good health, and the blessings from a deity, etc.

In this greeting Paul and Timothy join in the salutation, identifying themselves as servants of Christ Jesus. Timothy had been with Paul while he was in Philippi so was known to the church there. In all of Paul’s letters, except I and II Thessalonians and Philippians he introduced himself as an apostle. Here he simply speaks of himself and Timothy “servants of Christ Jesus.” The Greek word which is translated servants is **δουλος** (*doulos*). He does not use this word in his salutation except here, and in Romans and Titus. This is the common word for bondservant or slave. Paul uses it to describe himself and Timothy as those who are honored to be under the ownership of a loving Master, not as a resentful servile relationship to Christ.

He addresses the letter to “all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.” The word “saints” is the most frequently used word in the New Testament when addressing the followers of Christ. It is used about forty-five times. “Disciple” is used about thirty times, but “Christian” is used only three times. The Greek word which is translated “saint” is **αγιος** (*hagios*) meaning “holy.” To the pagan world, this would have been the single most notable characteristic of the followers of Christ. They were set apart for a life devoted to God, *i.e.* people who were different because of their dedicated lives. The expression “in Christ Jesus” is characteristically Pauline. He uses it about forty-eight times whereas the phrase is used only about four times in the rest of the New Testament.

1:1. “With the overseers (bishops) and deacons.” The word translated “overseer” or “bishop” is **επισκοπος** (*episkopos*), from which we get the word “Episcopal” referring primarily to a form of church polity or government. Throughout the centuries of Christian history, the word “bishop” has been the subject of great controversy, and its original meaning has been lost or at least obscured.

Does the word refer primarily to an office (an official position of authority), to a position brought about through apostolic succession as in Catholicism, to a work, or is it a combination of these and other factors? Are those who were designated “bishops” the same as those who were designated as “elders” or “presbyters” (**πρεσβυτερος** (*presbuteros*))? Does the word translated “pastors” (**ποιμην** – *poimēn*) also refer to these men (the bishops)? In a hierarchical arrangement the word “bishop” has come to have different meaning and applications from its New Testament usage, and it stands primarily for a position or authority. An “elder” on the other hand is thought by some to refer to an official of a lower “rank.”

The word “pastor” is descriptive of the work of guiding the flock of God. In considering the text we cannot overlook the fact that history has played a dominant role in contemporary understanding (or misunderstanding) and usage of the word “bishop.” The Council of Trent, which met periodically from 1545-1563 declared that the order of bishops was distinct from the presbyters (elders), and that to hold otherwise was heretical. This supported the Catholic dogma of apostolic succession which met with very strong opposition during the Reformation.

In Acts 20 Paul called the elders (*πρεσβυτερος* – *presbuteros*) of the Ephesian church to Miletus where he addressed them as bishops or overseers (*επισκοπος* – *episkopos*), and told them to do the work of “pastors” (*ποιμανω* – *poimainō* – shepherds). In I Pet. 5:1-2 we have a similar picture. When referring to both bishops and deacons in Phil. 1:1, E.F. Scott says, “The Greek words means nothing more than ‘overseers and assistants’ and we must not read into them the more definite significance which they acquired at a later day.” (E.F. Scott, *The Interpreter’s Bible: The Epistle to the Philippians*, vol. 11, p. 16.) The word “overseer” was a common word in the Greek language, and was not descriptive of an official ecclesiastical position, but of a work assigned to a certain group of men. Those who were supervising or were in charge of various works were referred to as the *επισκοποι* (*episkopoi*) or overseers of the work. The word is also used in the LXX in this way.

The word translated “deacons” is *διακονος* (*diakonos*). This word was in common use among the Greek speaking people of the first century. It is not a religious word but is variously translated as servant, minister, helper or deacon. Jesus spoke of his own work as that of a *διακονος* (*diakonos*) when he said that he “came, not to be ministered to but to minister” (Matt. 20:28 and other places). In these references he was speaking of his work, not his position.

During the early centuries of Christianity, the word *διακονος* (*diakonos*) began to be used in a technical sense and lost most of its original root meaning of “servant.” As stated above, in a similar manner the word “bishop” came to mean an office or position of authority within the Christian community. By the end of the second century bishops were ordaining men to subordinate positions in the church, and deacons were among those so designated. In the Greek text the word occurs about eighty-eight times. Eighty-three times it is translated minister, servant, or helper. Five times it refers to “deacons” in the church, but four of these are found in I Tim. 3:8-13 where Paul describes the character and spiritual maturity of men who should be serving. The only other time it is translated “deacons” is in Phil. 1:1. In its verb form it is translated to serve or to minister to. In I Tim. 3:13 *διακονειτωσαν* (*diakoneitōsan*) is translated as “the office of a deacon” in the KJV, reflecting the theological atmosphere of 16th and 17th century England and the Anglican Church. The ASV, RSV, and NIV all translate it as “those who serve well.” The word literally means “to perform a tasks or work of service.” Deacons are not represented in the New Testament as officers of the church, or as men in positions of authority, or as those who are being groomed to later become elders. They are simply men who serve. When we understand this principle, Paul’s identification of Phoebe as a “servant (*διακονον* -- servant), of the church in Cenchrea,” (Rom. 16:1) becomes perfectly clear and should never present a problem to us. She was simply a servant of the church, not an “officer” in the congregation.

1:2. “Grace and peace to you . . .” This also was part of Paul’s customary greeting, the form of which was common in the ancient world. Ancient salutations were usually followed by one or two sentences expressing the desire of the sender that the addressee may have good health, joy, success or happiness. In all of Paul’s letters he greets his addressees with these two words, although there is modification in some of them. The word translated “grace” has a variety of meanings – charm, beauty, gift, joy, favor, attractiveness, or goodwill. Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the inner confidence of harmony between man and his Creator. Peace is not a truce nor a ceasefire, but the willing surrender of oneself to the sovereignty of God. It brings harmony to life and health to the spirit because it is peace from God. A basic consideration in “peace” is that of reconciliation. There is a combination of the Greek and Hebrew ideals in this expression. **χαρις** (*charis*) is a Greek greeting meaning favor, joy, or gift. It was sometimes used by the Greeks as a greeting which would be translated into English as “Hail to you.” The word “peace” **ειρηνη** (*eirēnē*) is a characteristic the Hebrew ideal.

1:3-11. “I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel . . .”

1:3. Paul says, “I thank my God,” indicating a close personal relationship which he experiences with God. The word **δεησις** (*deēsis*) which is translated “prayer,” properly means a supplication, or a petitionary prayer or request. It is sometimes used in requesting things from other people as well as from God. The ordinary word for prayer is **προσευχη** (*proseucē*) and it is almost always used in reference to requests or prayers directed to God. See Phil. 4:6 where both of these words are used.

1:4-5. Paul tells his friends in Philippi that he is constantly praying for them. He does so with joy (**χαρις** --*charis*), because he is thankful for their fellowship, **κοινωνια** (*koinōnia*) in the gospel. Both of these words and thier cognates were in common use among the Greeks. Although the word **κοινωνια** (*koinōnia*) is usually translated “fellowship,” its root meaning is not so much social interaction as it is the active sharing of work or other activities as in Rom. 12:13, 27, (to share or communicate), Lk. 5:10 (partners), and Philem. 17 (partner). The English expression “Christian fellowship” is usually used today to describe social enjoyment or social contact with other Christians. The original word carries a much broader meaning of actively working together or participating with others in a common project. It occurs frequently in the Pauline and the Johannine epistles.

Paul thanks the Philippians for their “partnership in the gospel.” Although 4:10-19 speaks of their gifts, in 1:4 the use of the word **εις** (*eis*) in the phrase **κοινωνια υμων εις το ευαγγελιον** (*koinōia humōn eis to euaggelion*) “your fellowship in (into) the gospel” indicates active participation “from the first day until now.” That is not saying that Paul is thankful that they were participants in the blessings of the gospel, but in they were participants in the propagation of the gospel.

1:6-8. God was the “one who began a good work in you,” and Paul was confident that he would carry it “on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” This refers to the fact that their conversion to Christ was the work of God’s grace, and that God would continue to bring them to maturity or full growth (**επιτελεσει** - *epitelesei*). This would be brought about ultimately in “the day of Christ Jesus.” Paul consistently uses this expression when referring to the second coming of Christ (*parousia*). E.F. Scott believes that Paul’s words here would have a special

significance to those converted from one of the mystery religions of paganism. Those religions had an initiatory rite which prepared them for the next “step” toward making them “perfect.” So Paul is telling the Philippians that God is able to bring them, step by step to full maturity in Christ, not the superstitious perfection of paganism. (See E.F. Scott, *The Interpreter’s Bible: The Epistle to the Philippians*. Vol. 11, pp. 21-23.) Paul held the Philippians in high esteem (“I hold you in my heart”) as “partakers with me of grace.”

In verse 8 Paul uses the word, **σπλαγχνοις** (*splagchnois*). It literally refers to certain organs of the body – the heart, the liver, and the lungs. To the ancient Greeks this word was descriptive of the seat of the emotions in much the same way that people today speak of affections of the “heart.” In this passage it is variously translated “in the bowels,” (KJV), “tender mercies,” (ASV) or “affection” (RSV, NIV).

1:9-11. Paul prayed that their love may abound. The word here translated “love” is that which is almost always used in the New Testament, **αγάπη** (*agapē*). There is a contrast between the New Testament use of “love” and general Greek practices. The Greeks had four words for “love.” They were **αγάπη** (*agapē*), involving the will to love, **στοργή** (*storge*) which emphasizes emotional love, **φίλος** (*philos*) which is love within the family, and **ερός** (*eros*) which is erotic or sexual love. Both **αγάπη** (*agapē*) and **φίλος** (*philos*) are used in the New Testament, but the other two are not. Love, like knowledge and judgment (discernment), grows, and this is Paul’s prayer for the Philippians. The word for discernment carries an ethical dimension, stating that Paul wants them to grow in their perception and understanding of the ethical rights and wrongs of the Christian life. By doing so, they will be putting to the test and understand the things which are excellent. The word translated “excellent” is **διαφεροντα** (*diaferonta*), which means to compare and notice what is different because of the superiority of one thing over another. See Matt. 6:26, Matt. 10:31, Gal. 2:6, Heb. 14 and 8:6. Notice that Paul speaks of this immediately after mentioning the growth of their love. It may be that Paul is indirectly contrasting the old pagan concept of indulgent “love” and immorality with the purity of love as a Christian.

In this section Paul uses one of his favorite words, **δικαιοσύνη** (*dikaiosunē*), “righteousness.” Here he is using it primarily in a moral-ethical sense as it pertains to good deeds (not meritorious works however). Later in 3:1-11 he will use the word in a technical way which is the more familiar Pauline mode.

1:12-18. “The important thing is that in every way . . . Christ is preached.”

In this section Paul shows what effect his imprisonment has had on the spread of the gospel. Both directly (1:12-14) and indirectly (1:15-18) his situation has encouraged others to preach Christ.

1:12-14. Paul was imprisoned by those who opposed Christianity and wanted to deter the spread of the gospel. Instead of deterring it, just the opposite had taken place. Throughout the praetorian guard everyone knew he was a prisoner for the sake of the gospel of Christ. This had become an encouragement to the brothers in Rome where he was being held prisoner, and they were speaking out more boldly. The notoriety of his confinement had helped rather than hindered. He was confined in his own rented house and was permitted to receive visitors, but he was guarded

by soldiers (Acts 28:17). No doubt he became acquainted with these guards, and it is probable that they heard him discussing the gospel with his visitors.

The word **πραιτωριον** (*praitorion*) is translated “palace” or “palace guard” in the KJV and NIV, and “praetorian guard” in the ASV and RSV. The word “guard” is not in the original, although it is a reasonable assumption that this is what Paul had in mind. The translation “palace” or “palace guard” may be an attempt by the translators to identify Paul’s residence at the imperial palace. This does not seem to be an accurate idea however. Acts 28 does not locate him in that sort of circumstance, and the mentioning of the praetorian guard does not necessitate this.

The praetorian guard was an elite company established by Augustus Caesar (63 B.C. – A.D.14), and from time to time the emperors would change their number and placement. They were not confined to the palace or imperial residence. When the emperor was traveling, some of those guards would accompany him. At one time there were as many as sixteen thousand hand-picked soldiers who formed this guard. Originally they had to be of Italian birth, but this varied from time to time and from one emperor to another. Marvin Vincent mentions a wide variety of areas where the praetorian guards were used. (See Marvin Vincent, *The International Critical Commentary: Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*. pp. 51-52.) Not all commentators agree with Vincent. H.A.A. Kennedy contends that this is the expression “praetorian guard” refers to the palace itself. Kennedy contends that before Paul’s release his confinement became more comfortable, and that his trial may have been under way at the time he was writing Philippians. (See H.A.A. Kennedy, *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament: The Epistle to the Philippians*. Vol. III, p. 423.)

1:15-18. Rivalry between preachers of the gospel had caused some to preach out of selfish ambitions, while others were sincere in their deliverance of the message. Paul recognizes that some of this selfish ambition might bring more difficulty to him, but he says that makes no difference. What he is happy over is the fact that Christ is preached although some of the motives might be false or less than noble. We know from the book of Romans that there was conflict in the church at Rome. Paul had written to them and dealt with the Judaizers and misconceptions of the nature of the gospel. Some have thought that these might have been the source of the conflicts and rivalry being spoken of in Phil. 1:15-18. Some of the preachers with false motives may have become opponents of Paul, and were glad to see him confined. But are these the preachers to whom Paul is referring in 1:17?

Paul’s severity in dealing with the Judaizers in Galatians and Romans shows that advocacy of those doctrines could not be considered simply as ministerial rivalry, jealousy or bad motives. In both of those epistles he deals with the Judaizers as serious false teachers. He showed that such teaching altered the very nature of the gospel itself. (Gal. 1:6-10) Perhaps it is simpler and more nearly accurate to conclude that some in Rome were simply jealous (“envious”) of Paul (1:14), and were out to hurt him.

1:19-29. “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

In some fashion this statement summarizes Paul’s attitude toward the strife and rivalry just described. Regardless of what might come to him, Christ has been and will continue to be his goal in life, but he is aware and completely confident of the reward which await him in death.

He is anticipating release from his confinement, and that the Philippians have had part in this through their prayers. He expects and hopes that his courage will continue to sustain him through his coming trials and Christ will be exalted in his body. He dearly wants to be of service to others in his ministry of the gospel, but he knows that death will bring him into the presence of Christ. It places him in a dilemma – but it is a good dilemma for the choices are not between the desirable and undesirable, but between two very noble desires. He knows that he will bring a blessing to them by his ministry. For that he is grateful.

In 1:19 Paul speaks positively of how their prayers and the Spirit of Christ will ultimately be for his “deliverance.” The Greek word translated “deliverance” is **σωτηριαν** (*sōtērian*). In the KJV it is usually translated “salvation,” but it also means “deliverance” from spiritual or physical perils. It generally carries a broad spectrum of meanings involving all of the blessings found in God’s grace. He expresses the hope to have the courage to be completely bold. The expression **εν πασῃ παρρησιᾳ** (*en pasē parrēsia*) is translated “with all boldness,” (KJV, ASV), “with full courage (RSV) or “have sufficient courage” (NIV). It is a strong expression particularly applicable to the courage to speak out boldly without hesitation or feeling of intimidation. In Paul’s situation he wanted this courage even if it meant his own death.

He follows this expression with the statement that for him “to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” This is his way of saying that Christ is his goal in life. He then expresses his dilemma spoken of above. It is important to notice the confidence which Paul had in both life and death. He had no fear of either, and he knew what each would hold for him. Living meant fruitful labor for the cause of Christ. Dying meant assuredly that he would be with Christ. He had no doubt about this, not because he considered his life to be so good that he deserved it, but, as he will express in 4: 7-11, he was totally dependent on the grace of God for the gift of salvation.

In 1:27-29 he tells the Philippian Christians to conduct their lives “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,” so that whether he (Paul) comes to see them, or just hears reports of their lives and work he will know that they stand firm in contending for the faith of the gospel. The Greek word **πολιτευεσθε** (*politeuesthe*), translated “manner of life” is interesting. It is a verb in the second person plural, present imperative. This means that it is a command rather than an exhortation. An exhortation almost certainly would have been in the first person plural present subjunctive, referred to as the hortatory subjunctive. In that case it would be translated, “Let us . . . live worthy of the gospel.” The verb form is used only here and in Acts 23:1 where Paul says “I have fulfilled my duty” to God. The root word means to be a citizen. As used here it means to conduct one’s life in a noble way as would be characteristic of a good citizen. In 3:20 Paul will say that our citizenship is in heaven. In that passage however he uses the word **πολιτευμα** which is from the same root, but is the noun form. We may paraphrase his statement as saying, “You are to conduct your lives on earth as a noble citizen of heaven itself.” Some opposed the Christian life of the Philippians, and Paul says that such opposition is an evident sign of their destruction, but it is also a sign of the Christian’s own salvation.

Christology and the Christian Life

Phil. 2:1-30

Chapter 2 of Philippians is best known for its Christological statement in 2:5-11. However, the link between Christology and the Christian life is forgotten or overlooked by the average reader. Paul shows us that Christology is the basis of the Christian life. Paul makes no effort to explain the Trinity or the relationship of the Father and the Son. These are not his goals. We need to try to understand what the Bible actually says about these things, the meaning of the words used to describe Christ and the Father, and accept the undeniable fact of the incarnation and its significance in our lives.

This section divides itself into three blocks. They are: (1) Some principles of personal godliness, (2) Christology and personal godliness, and (3) the practice of personal godliness.

2:1-4. “Be likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

With the transitional phrase **εἰ τις σὺν** (*ei tis sun*) Paul ties his preceding statements to that which he is about to say. This phrase is translated, “If *there be* therefore . . .” (KJV), “If there is therefore . . .” (ASV) “So if there is . . .” (RSV), or “If you have any . . .” (NIV). He has just told them to live worthy of the gospel of Christ. Therefore he will now show them how to do it. He uses four statements beginning with “if” (**εἰ τις**) in 2:1: “if there is encouragement from being united with Christ,” “if there is any comfort from his love,” “if there is any fellowship with the Spirit,” and “if there is any tenderness and compassion.” We will look at each of these conditional phrases.

2:1, We should first notice that by using the term “if” in each of these four clauses Paul is not intending to introduce doubt in the mind of the reader, but he uses the word as we would say, “If a certain thing is true, then this is what follows.” This expresses the fact that “Since this is true, we conclude certain things.” His first “if” is **παρακλησις** (*paraklēsis*) which is translated “consolation” (KJV) or “encouragement” (in most other English translations). It is a compound word made up of **παρα** (*para*) meaning “alongside” or “beside” and **καλεω** (*kaleō*) meaning “to call.” The word literally means one whom you call to your side. It was used as a legal term referring to one who pleads a case in behalf of another as in a court trial. That is, one who is called to your side to advocate your cause. Although this word can mean consolation, most linguists consider “encouragement” a better translation for this context. The word is from the same root as **παρακλητος** (*paraklētos*) used by Jesus in John 14:16, 25, 15:26, etc. There it is translated “counselor” or “advocate” when Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit. The translation “advocate” presents a more nearly accurate idea than counselor. See I John 2:1. In II Cor. 6:1 Paul uses a cognate of this word to entreat or encourage the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain.

The second word in these “if” clauses is **παραμυθιον** (*paramuthion*) which is translated “comfort or consolation.” This also is a compound word which is composed of **παρα** (*para*), meaning “beside” and **μυθεομαι** (*mutheomai*) meaning “a speech.” This compound word came to mean “one who offers comforting words.” Paul says, “If there are any comforting words emitting from Christ’s words . . .”

His third element in these “if” clauses is **κοινωνια πνευματος** (*koinōnia pneumatos*), translated “fellowship of [or in or with] the Spirit.” The word “Spirit” is in the genitive case, and can be translated in any one of the above ways, “of,” “in,” of “with.” The word **κοινωνια** was discussed in the previous chapter. This phrase shows that the Spirit is the life principle of the church community.

His fourth element in these “if” clauses is **σπλαγχνα και οικτηριμοι** (*splagchna kai oiktirmoi*), translated “any tenderness and compassion” (NIV) “any bowels and mercies” (KJV), “any affection and sympathy” (RSV), or “any tender mercies and compassions” (ASV). Paul has already used the word **σπλαγχνα** (*splagchna*) which was discussed in the previous chapter. These two words in this phrase are close akin in their meanings, and seem to complement each other.

2:2-3. Paul states that his reward for seeing their godly lives will be the fulfillment of his own joy. They can do this by being like-minded, having the same love, being united in spirit and purpose, doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but live lives of humility and consideration for others. Some commentators believe that Paul’s statements concerning vainglory and selfish ambitions” may imply that the Philippian church had a problem of division or disunity similar to the Corinthian church. There is no evidence of this in the general tone of this letter.

Paul uses the expression **το αυτο φρονητε** (*to auto phronōte*). The word **φρονητε** (*phronēte*) means to think, and it is in the present tense. The force of this expression is continuous or linear action, *i.e.* “continue thinking.” But this word does not deal simply with thoughts, but with the state of mind. See below on verse 5. The phrase **το αυτο** (*to auto*) literally means “the thing” or “this thing.” This Greek expression therefore means, “Keep on thinking like this,” *i.e.* the four things I have just written, and that which is to follow.

At this point Paul states one of the truly revolutionary principles of Christianity, that of humility. The word Paul uses for “humility” is **ταπεινοφροσυνη** (*tapeinophrosunē*) which literally means “lowliness of mind.” Marvin Vincent, when commenting on this word says, “In classical Greek **ταπεινος** (*tapeinos*) usually implies meanness of condition; lowness of rank . . . in no sense opposed to self-righteousness. . . . The word **ταπεινοφροσυνη** (*tapeinophrosunē*) is an outgrowth of the gospel. It does not appear before the Christian era.” (Marvin Vincent, *The International Critical Commentary: Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*. p. 56.) In addition, E.F. Scott says, “Paul had here to coin a word, for the idea he wished to express was one which had hitherto found no place in Greek thought or language. It had been taken for granted that everyone ought to *assert* himself, and that no one but a fool or a coward would yield of his own accord to any rival. Paul tells the Philippians that as Christians they must have a humble disposition: ‘count others better than yourselves.’” (E.F. Scott, *The Interpreter’s Bible: The Epistle to the Philippians*, vol. 11, p. 45.)

This complements what Paul has just said about doing nothing out of selfish ambition and vain conceit, along with what is to follow about considering others better than oneself and the humiliation-obedience of Christ. These principles strike at the root of much of the Roman and Greek thinking of his time. Pride in one's own achievements, to the point of arrogance, was considered a great virtue among them. Humility, on the other hand, was considered the ultimate weakness, and was to be avoided. In this respect, there was a marked difference between Roman thought and Christian thought. Paul is certainly not saying that Christians are to consider themselves inferior to others, but he is stating that recognition and acceptance of our own strengths is to be balanced with recognition and acceptance of our own weaknesses. Along with this, humility includes our willingness to accept the weaknesses and strengths of others. This is to take place in an atmosphere of love and consideration.

2:5-11. “He humbled himself becoming obedient even unto death . . .”

This passage, 2:5-11, is one of the most beautiful and practical, yet one of the most complex in the entire Bible. John’s prologue (Jn. 1:1-18) also describe the mystery of the incarnation, yet neither Paul nor John answers our questions of curiosity about the Trinity (a word not found in Scripture), nor the relationship of the Father and Son in the incarnation. This is not their goal. Instead, Paul is emphasizing the humility of Christ, saying this is the mind which should pervade the thinking of all Christians. We are not asked to understand the incarnation concepts, but to accept and appreciate them. To the Corinthians Paul wrote, “God was in Christ” (II Cor. 5:19), and for this we are eternally thankful. It was because of this that Christ’s sacrifice can reach out to us. The Christian life is based on the principles laid out in this passage.

In 2:5 Paul uses the words **τούτῳ φρονεῖτε εν υμῖν** (*touto phroneite en humin*). The verb **φρονεῖτε**, is 2nd person plural present imperative. The word means “to have a mindset.” The RSV translates this “among yourselves” but this is rejected by many translators including the NRSV. Paul’s message is more than a simple appeal to think or exercise one’s mental power of concentration. Instead, it deals with the state of one’s mind. The present tense describes linear or continuous action, and the imperative gives it a sense of command or necessity. The literal idea expressed here is, “It is necessary that you continually have this mindset in you.” The next phrase is **ο καὶ εν Χριστῷ Ἰησού** (*ho kai en Christō Iēsou*). Literally translated it says, “which also in Christ Jesus.” The verb **ἦν** (*ēn*) translated “was” is supplied by the translators, but does not appear in the Greek text.

2:6. “Who, being in very nature, God” (NIV), or “who existing in the form of God” (ASV), or “who, though he was in the form of God” (RSV, NRSV), or “who, being in the form of God” (KJV). It is easy to suppose that Paul is attempting to describe the human-divine aspect of Jesus’ earthly existence, but we must remember that Paul’s purpose is to show the contrast of humiliation and exaltation which came to him. The basis of this was his obedience unto death.

The Greek phrase **μορφὴ Θεοῦ** (*morphe theou*) is translated “form of God.” The word **μορφὴ** (*morphe*) means more than just appearance. It speaks of the essence, but it is difficult to find an accurate equivalent English word. Paul gives no explanation of this, but contrasts it, with **μορφὴ δούλου** (*morphe doulou*), the “form of a servant.” That is, Christ was in the “form of God,” but he took on himself “the form of a servant”. Although he was God, he became a

servant. Much debate has taken place concerning the nature of Christ as God compared with his nature as a human being, but this is not Paul's goal. By using the word **μορφή** in both instances, he shows that Jesus did not simply take up the "dress" of a servant, but he was, in fact, a human servant in his very essence. This has some similarity to the statement in Heb. 2:17 that "he [Christ] had to be made like his brothers in every way." This fits very well into Paul's statement in 2:3 where he speaks of humility. In 2:7 the word **σχῆμα** (*schēma*) is used to describe his "looks." That is, he was found in "fashion" as a man. People saw the appearance (**σχῆμα** - *schēma*) as well as the very essence (**μορφή** *morpheē*) of a human being.

An interesting word is used here to describe what Christ did. The Greek text reads, **αλλα εαυτον εκενωσεν** (*alla eauton ekenōsen*), "but he emptied himself." Once again we see the contrast which Paul has in mind because of the use of the word **αλλα** (*alla*) meaning "but" or "instead of." The intriguing word is **εκενωσεν** (*ekenōsen*) which means "to empty, evacuate, divest oneself." Here the phrase is translated "but (he) emptied himself." Vincent says that the word is "not used or intended here in a metaphysical sense to define the limitations of Christ's incarnate state, but as a strong and graphic expression of the completeness of his self-renunciation." (Marvin Vincent, *The International Critical Commentary: Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*. p. 59.) Some raise speculative questions: Of what did Christ empty himself? Was it his divinity? Was it his equality with God? Was it his power? Was it his prerogatives? Paul is not interested in these and he does not address them in any way. Instead, he is drawing a contrast between Christ's pre-human equality with God and his human humility and obedience. This is to be an encouragement for the Philippians to "have the mindset which was in Christ Jesus."

The Christological controversies in the church from the second century until about the fifth century created much speculation concerning the "nature of Christ." Although they produced certain "formulas" about his human-divine nature, they did not really explain anything. These controversies go back as far as Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) and Irenaeus (A.D. 135-200). The Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and other councils which came later dealt with the issues of Christology and the Trinity, but, for all practical purposes, they solved nothing.

It is important that we see that Paul emphasized the fact that the Son became a servant. This was the mindset of Jesus which Paul commands of the Philippians. He uses a number of descriptive words to emphasize the fact that Jesus looked like a man, served like a man, and was, in fact of the same essence as every human being. He was no mere phantom as the Gnostics later described him. The grand lesson here is that the one who was equal with God humbled himself and became a human servant. But he was an absolutely obedient servant finally experiencing death on the cross. Paul is simply stating: "You must continually have this mindset in you as it was demonstrated in Christ Jesus."

The result of his humble obedience "even unto death" was that God highly exalted him, giving him a name that is above every name. In verse 9, the word **διό** (*dio*) is used, "in consequence of which," or "therefore," referring to Christ's obedience. The consequence of his obedience was that he received a name above every name, and that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess the Lordship of Jesus. Paul says that this will include all things everywhere. That is, things in heaven, on earth, or under the earth. This was his figure of speech.

The word **κύριος** (*kurios*) translated “Lord” does not necessarily imply divinity. It was the common word for “master” as in I Pet. 3:6 where Sarah calls Abraham “lord,” or Eph. 6:9 where it is translated “masters” with reference to the master-slave relationship. It was commonly used in this nontechnical way, but it is also applied to the lordship of Christ many times in the New Testament. The earliest “confession” practiced in the church is thought to have been the simple statement, “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Williston Walker, the eminent church historian says, “In first century communities this confession may have been a Christological affirmation like ‘Jesus Christ is Lord.’” (Williston Walker, R.A. Norris, D.W. Lotz, and R.T. Handy. *A History of the Christian Church*. Fourth edition. New York: Scribner, p. 72.)

2:12-18. “Therefore . . . continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

With the mindset of humility, service, and obedience displayed by Christ Jesus, Paul tells the Philippians they must keep working on their salvation as God works in them to bring about his own will in their lives. Paul commends the Philippians for their obedience while he was present, but even more completely in his absence.

Their obedience is to be with **φόβος καὶ τρόμος** (*phobos kai tromos*), translated “fear and trembling.” These are both strong words which vividly describe one’s need to obey. This is not the softened expression referring to “respect and awe,” although these are certainly implied. Nor does it say that man should be afraid of God. But the element of fear of punishment and fear of God must never be lost, even when we clearly see and experience the love of God. The writer of Hebrews expressed it well when he speaks of those who are disobedient. He says, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). This statement in Philippians does not contradict Paul’s contention in Romans and Galatians and elsewhere that we are saved by God’s grace and not by our own meritorious works. Paul emphasizes man’s obedient participation in the scheme of redemption both here and elsewhere.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian who was arrested during World War II because he spoke out against the Nazi regime. He was executed just days before the end of the war in Europe. While in prison he wrote about what he termed “cheap grade,” that is, the teaching that the grace of God relieves man of the obligations of obedience. Bonhoeffer said:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy, [for] which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.

From *Christianity Today*, www.christianitytoday.com

In 2:14-18 Paul emphasizes the importance of Christians living lives of humility, service, and obedience so that they will be seen as shining stars in a universe of darkness. In doing so, it will give Paul great pride in them, knowing that his labor with them was not useless. As such, they are admonished to live without arguing and complaining. The Greek text describes the generation in which Paul lived as, **σκολιως καὶ διεστραμμενῆς** (*skolias kai diestrammenēs*). It was a fitting description as “depraved and perverted.” In contrast, he says he wants them to be faultless in the midst of the corruption around them. This is the only place in the New Testament where Paul uses these words.

Paul recognized the possibility of his future punishment and described it as being “poured out as a libation.” This is an Old Testament figure in which wine was apparently poured over an animal’s body prior to it being offered as a sacrifice. It was referred to as a drink offering. See references to this in Lev. 23:13, 18, and 37. No detailed description is given for these drink offerings, but they accompanied many of the other offerings under the Law. This figure of speech would also be familiar to the Gentiles in Philippi, because the pouring out of a libation was practiced extensively in pagan worship.

2:19-30. “I have no one else like him.”

This block is devoted to Paul’s personal plans and his plans to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to Philippi. This is one of those very personal statements of Paul which gives us some insight into his life. He expects that very soon he also will be able to come see them.

Timothy had joined Paul and Silas in Lystra, and, no doubt, had been with them when they first visited Philippi. Later, when Paul left Berea, Timothy and Silas were left there. They joined Paul in Corinth. See Acts 16:10-15, 18:5. In Phil. 2:19-20 Paul states his intent to send Timothy to them so that he might receive a cheerful message concerning the Philippians. He has no one like Timothy who is so genuinely interested in the welfare of the Philippians.

Paul uses two interesting words in describing Timothy. The first is **ἴσοψυχον** (*isopsuchon*) which literally means to be “equal in soul or life.” Paul says that Timothy, more than anyone else, shares my own mind – we see eye to eye on things. This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. The other word of particular interest in this statement is **γνησιώς** (*gnēsiōs*). The word is also very descriptive because it says, “it is as if we had the same parents.” These two words used together form the most striking description in the New Testament of Paul’s affection and confidence in Timothy

The next sentence, vs. 21, is like a parenthetical comment from Paul. He says that others seem to look out for their own interests, but Timothy is not like that. Verse 22 states again that his relationship to Timothy is like that of a father to a son, and that Timothy has worked constantly with Paul. Paul then says that as soon as he finds out his own destiny he will send Timothy.

No doubt Paul is speaking of his expectation that his case might soon come to trial or some sort of disposition will be made of it. He is optimistic and believes that he will soon have an opportunity to return to Philippi. In Philem. 22-24 Paul says that he expects to be released shortly and will visit Philemon in Colosse. In his letter to Philemon, he refers to a “fellow

prisoner” named Epaphras who sent greetings to Philemon. In Col. 4:12 he also says that Epaphras was with him in Rome, and sent greetings to the Colossian church. The question naturally arises as to whether the Epaphroditus of Phil. 2:25 and 4:18 was to be identified with the Epaphras mentioned in the letters to Philemon and Colosse. Vincent expresses the view of the majority of commentators that the names, though possibly connected, do not refer to the same person because their areas of activity are so widely separated.

In verse 25 Paul says Epaphroditus was the messenger whom the Philippians had sent to take care of him. Paul is now sending him back to Philippi. He is referred to as a fellow worker, a brother, and a fellow soldier. In stating that he was sent to “take care” (NIV) of Paul, many translations say “to minister to my needs” (KJV, ASV) or “minister to my wants.” (RSV). Paul does not use the common word **διάκονος** (*diakonos*) translated servant or minister but **λειτουργόν** (*leitourgon*) which refers to a person who performs public services at his own expense, particularly one who serves in relief work as in Rom. 13:6, Heb. 1:7, Heb. 8:2. It is also interesting that Epaphroditus is referred to as their “apostle” **ἀπόστολος** (*apostolos*), that is, one who is sent on a mission.

In verse 26 Paul mentions that Epaphroditus was anxious to see them, particularly because they had heard that he was very sick. Paul said he almost died, but now is well, and was concerned they were worried about him. When speaking of Epaphroditus’ close scrape with death Paul uses the peculiar word, **παραβολευσαμένος** (*parabouleusamenos*) which is a gambler’s term meaning to take a chance or risk of one’s life. Some commentators, e.g. E.F. Scott, believe Paul might have been disgusted with Epaphroditus for taking such a risk, and was glad to have him go back to Philippi so he (Paul) wouldn’t have any more sorrow about him. (E.F. Scott, *The Interpreter’s Bible: The Epistle to the Philippians*, vol. 11, p. 70.) This however certainly is not demanded by the text, and goes against the other things Paul said about him. They were to receive him with honor because he had risked his life for the cause of Christ.

Warnings to the Philippians

Phil 3:1-21

Introduction:

The tone of chapter three is quite different from that of chapters one and two. Paul has spoken frequently of the joy of the Philippians, and his sharing in their joy. After reaffirming this in 3:1, he begins warning them of dangers. Some commentators believe there were serious problems in Philippi, and Paul is now addressing them. Some believe these are rather mild rebukes, or references to problems in other churches with a warning to Philippi saying, “Don’t let this happen to you. Continue on your present course.” A few commentators believe that the warnings might have come from another letter which Paul wrote to Philippi but which has not survived, and that a fragment of that letter found its way into our copy of Philippians. There is, however no textual or manuscript evidence to support this, although it is not unreasonable to suppose that Paul could have written other letters which have not survived. He makes reference to such in I Cor. 5:9. Any of these situations could have given rise to Paul’s exhortations in chapters 3 and 4 with the possible exception of his statement to Euodia and Syntyche. Commentators all agree however that the general demeanor of the letter changes, and those important corrective warnings were issued.

3:1. “Rejoice in the Lord . . .”

Paul cannot divorce himself from the joy he experiences when he thinks of this beloved church. He refuses to apologize for his continual statement of his joy saying, “It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again.” Although he introduces the thought with the phrase *το λοιπὸν* (*to loipon*) usually translated “finally,” the word can also mean “henceforth,” “besides,” or “as to what remains.” Although it can signal the ending of a letter, it is usually used as a transition word. Paul uses it in this sense at other times. See I Cor. 7:29, I Thess. 4:1, II Tim. 4:8. Some have thought that Paul intended to end the letter here, but had additional thoughts so continued. Barclay refers to Paul’s joy in this verse as “the indestructible joy” of a Christian because it is “joy in the Lord.” (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959. p. 63.)

But what does Paul mean when he says, “To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not irksome [tedious], but for you it is safe”? Some (including Vincent, Kennedy, Barclay, and others) believe he is referring to a previous letter, stating that he is again writing the same warnings, but that he does not mind doing this. On the other hand Paul seems to be referring to the warnings he is about to give them, which probably they have heard from various sources.

Problems of Judaizing teachers was widespread, and there can be little doubt that the Philippians had heard of or possibly been confronted with these teachings.

3:2-3. “Watch out for those dogs . . .”

He refers to three types of intruders who may be troublesome to the Philippian church. He uses very vivid language, and some commentators have considered these words to be abusive. There were “the dogs,” those “men who do evil,” and “those mutilators of the flesh.” Are these three separate groups of false teachers or just one problem group described under three separate figures? The word **βλεπετε** (*blepete*), which is used to introduce each of these warnings, rightly means “to look at,” “consider,” or “behold.” Because the context shows that this is a warning, it is translated, “beware” by most translators. Some believe this is a little too strong.

The presence of the definite article in the phrase **τους κυνας** (*tous kunas*) in the Greek text indicates that the writer is being specific. “Dog” was a term of contempt to both the Jews and the Gentiles. Under Levitical law, the “wages of a dog,” or the “hire of a prostitute” were alike forbidden to be brought into the house of God. It is generally thought that the reference to “dog” in that text refers to male prostitutes used in the heathen shrines, but the contemptible view of dogs is still upheld. The emphasis in Philippians is that these are terrible despicable characters of whom Paul was speaking. This may not refer to a specific group of false teachers, but to people of profane character contrasted with those of true Christian character. With this in mind, Gerald Hawthorne believes that these were not Judaizers at all, but Jews who were opposing Christianity. (See Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*. Vol. 43, on CD, Introduction, pp. xliv-xlvii).

The phrase **τουσ κακους εργατας** (*tous kakous ergatas*) translated, “men who do evil,” or “evil workers” may refer to the same (or same type of) persons. Paul identifies those of whom he is speaking by contrasting them with the Christians who are the true “circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (3:2). With this in mind, Paul may be creating a tacit contrast since the Jews took great pride in their good works of keeping the Law, but Paul now refers to them as them as evil workers, not workers of good. The RSV says “true circumcision” on the assumption that the remainder of the sentence implies Paul’s meaning of the “spiritual” circumcision. However, the word “true” is not in the Greek text.

Paul makes his contrast in 3:2 by telling the Philippians to “watch out for the mutilators,” using the word **κατατομη** (*kataatomē*) which literally means to “cut up, mutilate, or tear.” He is describing those who practice circumcision as a means of justification, and this could be a continuation of his description of the Judaizers (“evil workers”). In the mind of some Jews, the observance of circumcision gradually degenerated from a symbol of the covenant to the essence of the covenant. They began to think of it as indispensable for attaining a right relationship with God. The consequence of this was “confidence in the flesh,” and it came to be of great importance.

We should remember that Paul did not object to circumcision as such. He had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3), but he rejected it as a means of justification, and rightly so, for that was never the intent of the ordinance. This was repugnant to Paul who says that he has “no

confidence in the flesh,” meaning that his justification before God did not come from the act of circumcision. Instead, he says that as Christians, we glory in Christ Jesus. All of these statements concerning the false teachers are quite the opposite of Paul’s teaching on graces, faith, and justification. Midway through this chapter he will address the importance of these. Here he uses one of his favorite words, *καυχωμενοι* (*kauchōmenoi*) meaning to boast. See Rom. 2:17, I Cor. 1:31, and Gal. 6:14. He identifies Christians as those who worship *λατρευοντες* (*latreuentes*) by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ. This word for “worship” emphasizes worship from the point of view of homage and service as in Rom. 9:4 and 12:1. This word is used frequently in the LXX to describe the way Israel was to serve God, not only in worship. See Ex. 23:25, Deut. 10:12, and Josh. 22:27. This shows that the word was used in a very broad sense.

3:4-11. “The surpassing greatness of knowing Christ.”

Paul now gives his own pedigree in order to show that he himself is a true Israelite, yet this is not the source of his hope. He took a great deal of rightful pride in being an Israelite, but his hope is in Christ, not in his fleshly ancestry and loyalty to the Law. Some of the Jews boasted that they were part of the chosen nation, believing that this gave them privileges. In Romans, Paul reminds his recipients that the sinful Jews were no better than the sinful Gentiles. In Phil. 3:4-6 Paul shows himself to be a genuinely devout Jew, circumcised the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, etc. Benjamin was the second son of Rachael, Jacob’s favorite wife. The tribe of Benjamin was the only one loyal to Judah when Jeroboam led the northern rebellion of Israel. Ezra 4:1 shows that Benjamin and Judah stood together at the time of the return from Exile. Paul was indeed, a “Hebrew of the Hebrews.”

He mentions that he was of the strictest sect of the Jews, a Pharisee. Therefore he knew from experience the emphasis the Jews placed on strict observance of the Law and its traditions. So strict was his obedience to these things that he said he was blameless. His zeal for the Law led him to persecute Christians. In Acts 23:6 Paul said that he was as Pharisee, and that his father was a Pharisee. Furthermore, although he was born outside of Palestine (Tarsus), and could be considered a Hellenist, he was taught Judaism by Gamaliel, one of the best known teachers of his day. In Acts 26:5 as he stood trial before Agrippa, he affirmed his zeal for the Law and membership in the sect of the Pharisees. Although this word is used almost one hundred times in the Gospels and Acts, this is its only other occurrence in the New Testament.

Paul did not renounce Judaism nor did he teach that his fellow countrymen should do so. He showed them that “the Law is good if it is used lawfully” (I Tim. 1:8), and he is an “Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. Paul told the Romans that “God did not reject his people whom he foreknew.” Rom. 11:1-2. They only needed to see that Judaism was not a means of justification. This came through Christ. These statements lay the groundwork for his statement in 3:7 that he counts all of this loss for the sake of Christ.

The primary problem in the Jew’s rejection of Christ was their reliance on keeping the Law as a means of justification. Although there was a time when Paul would have considered his obedience to the Law as a great accomplishment, he immediately say that this type of thinking amounted to nothing – it was garbage, it was nothing compared to the grace of God which is mediated through trust in the sacrifice of Christ (Phil. 3:7-11).

It is important to see how Paul describes faith in 4:9. All of his accomplishments of obedience to the Law (any law) could not accomplish justification, or bring righteousness. No law ever has the power to forgive, and this was the primary error of the Pharisees. Paul's objection to "works salvation" did not reduce the necessity of strict obedience, but dealt with the purpose or motivation behind the obedience. Legalism is obedience to God's commandments as a means of justification. Paul said that obedience is absolutely necessary, but it is the grace of God in the sacrifice of Christ which is the means of justification. It is this in which the Christian must have his trust.

Therefore he says that he does not want to be depending on a righteousness of his own when he faces Christ, not even that which is of the Law. Why? Because obedience to law of any kind is not what forgives one's sins. Forgiveness is not the function of law. Law only defines. It does not forgive. All of these things he considers "loss for the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ." The reason is that it is only through Christ's sacrifice that forgiveness can come.

In 3:8, Paul uses the word **εξημισθην** (*ezēmiōthēn*) which is the first aorist, indicative, passive of **ζμιοω** (*zmioō*) which means "to forfeit or give up completely." The fact that he uses the aorist tense and the passive voice is significant. This tense indicates specific punctiliar action in past time when used with the indicative, and the passive voice says that it was something that was performed on the subject by another. Literally, Paul says that there was an instant time in the past (aorist) in which he was made the loser of what he had considered his own self attained righteousness. All of those so called attainments he counted as rubbish for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ. The word **σκυβαλα** (*skubala*) is translated "rubbish," meaning the garbage which is thrown out to be eaten by the dogs. This is its only occurrence in the New Testament. This word is so strong an expression of waste that some of the early church fathers are said to have been embarrassed by Paul's use of it. Once again, Paul is not speaking disparagingly of the Law, but of the idea of one depending on his own ability to keep of the Law as the source and means of one's own righteousness (justification).

In 3:9 Paul uses a phrase which one of his favorites – "in Christ." He uses it almost ninety times in his epistles. In addition he uses the expression "in him" many times referring to the same relationship. He views all of the Christian's life and activities within the close relationship the Christian has with Christ. The preposition **εν** (*en*) takes the locative case indicating the location of the subject. To be "in Christ" is the location of the Christian. That is where he is in his whole life, not just a part of his life. It is more than an association with, or an acquaintance. It is the closest possible relationship. It is very important that we see that Paul is not speaking of a righteousness which can be attained by one's own behavior. He pictures his appearance before the Judge of the earth, and is confident of his salvation because he will not be found claiming his own righteousness, but will be found securely "in Christ." His hope and security are the gifts of God (grace) which come through complete trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. When properly understood, this makes an absolute demand for our obedience, not in order to secure God's favor but as an expression of the Christian's deepest gratitude to God for providing this unspeakable gift of forgiveness and reconciliation through Christ.

Verse 10 speaks of Paul's overwhelming motivation in life to "know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead." (3:10-11). In this construction he uses the 2nd aorist active infinitive **γνωναι** (*gnōnai*) from the verb **γινωσκω** (*ginōskō*) meaning to know. It is an infinitive of purpose combined with the expression "in Christ" (locative). Paul says, "The place where my life is 'located' is in Christ, and the purpose of my life is 'to know' him intimately." Two elements are involved here: (1) to know the power of his resurrection and (2) to have the fellowship (partnership) with Christ's sufferings by conforming to his death. When Paul speaks of the "power of his resurrection" he uses the common word **δυναμιν** (*dunamin*), but he is not speaking of the power by which Christ was raised, or the power of our own resurrection at the last day. Instead, he speaks of the power which Christ's resurrection imparts to those who come to him trusting in his atonement. It is the power of the risen Christ as Paul lives in him and conducts his life in him. See comparable ideas in Rom. 6:4-11 and Col. 3:1-11 where the application of this principle is developed.

Having fellowship with his sufferings involves the familiar word **κοινωνια** (*koinōnia*) meaning "partnership" or "mutual participation." Paul is not saying that there is some kind of ethical or religious benefit in suffering for Christ, but an obedient life brings him into closer contact with the humility and self-denial of Christ's own life. The explanation of this is found in his expression, **συμμορφιζομενος τω Θανατω αυτου** (*summorphizomenos tō thanatō autou*) "being conformed to his death." The word translated "to be conformed" is in the passive voice meaning that Paul realizes that God works within him to create this conformity. It is not something which Paul says he does through his own power or determination, but as he has said in 2:14, "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Paul always saw that God was working in him to accomplish his own will. When we address the question of Paul's meaning of, "to attain to the resurrection from the dead," it obvious that he is not speaking of his own initiative or goodness, but he is allowing Christ to work in him. See also Gal. 5:22-23 where Paul affirms that the good things he describes are what the Spirit produces in life (the "fruit of the Spirit"), not simply the strength of personal efforts.

3:12-21. "I press on toward the goal . . ."

This discussion led Paul into another personal statement, and also a broader application for all Christians. In this block he uses two very descriptive phrases. First he speaks of wanting to "take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me," and his desire to "press on toward the goal to win the prize."

In 3:12-16 he says that he has not attained all that he has been speaking of, and that they should not misunderstand his statements. He is still in a growth process. He is not yet "perfect" that is, "full grown" or "complete." The word **τετελειωμαι** (*teteleiōmai*), which is the perfect indicative passive of **τελεω** (*teleō*), means "to complete a task," "bring to a conclusion," or "to finish." The passive again shows Paul's dependence on God to complete the good work which he has begun in Paul, and Paul sees himself as the recipient of God's guidance. God has not yet brought to completion what Paul sees is still lacking in his own character. He is claiming that his own sanctity of character is still not complete.

He had broken with his own past, just as many of the Philippians had done. However, he is still a learner just as are they. Paul is forgetting what is past in his life, and looking forward to that which is to come. He will not allow his past achievements to become a source of pride or reason to slide along or take it easy. Nor, will he allow his failures to be stumbling blocks of discouragement. He uses a descriptive word, **επεκτεινομένος** (*epekteinomenos*) which pictures a runner reaching toward his goal. This word is translated “straining forward,” “to press on,” or to “reach out toward.” Since it is a present participle its meaning is that “he continually presses on or reaches out toward the goal.” The word actually pictures a runner whose body is leaning forward as he races toward the goal. Here, Paul strongly affirms that the Christian life is always a striving to become the very best you can be, but he never sees this as one taking pride in his own accomplishments. Instead, it is Christ working in him.

In verse 15 Paul recognizes that there are different levels of spiritual maturity in the church so he addresses those who are mature encouraging them to continue to grow. He uses the hortatory subjunctive again (1st person plural present subjunctive), **τούτῳ φρονώμεν** (*touto phronōmen*), which is best translated, “Let us continue to have this mindset.” This is the ideal Christian goal, but all must recognize these different levels of spiritual maturity, and be patient with each one. So his exhortation is followed by the assurance that for those who are “otherwise minded” – not quite as mature – God will make things clearer as they grow. Paul is very discrete in the way he addresses this so as not to be discouraging to the less mature. In verse 16 he says they should walk by the same rule. The word translated “to walk” is **στοιχεῖν** (*stoichein*) which literally means to walk in a line or to advance according to a rule.

In 3:17-21 Paul continues his exhortation, but encourages them to follow his example, using the compound word **συμμιμηταί** (*summimētai*) which means “to be united (or together) as you imitate” me. In I Cor. 11:1 he uses the word without the prepositional prefix where he encourages the Corinthians to imitate him. This has been thought by some to be egotism on Paul’s part, but we must remember that he is speaking to Gentiles as well as to those with a Jewish background. The Gentiles would have had little idea of the moral-ethical standards of Christianity, and Paul does well to use himself as an example for them to follow.

Once again he turns to warnings about false teachers. Is he just reidentifying the Judaizers spoken of in 3:2-4 or is he introducing another group not heretofore identified? Commentators are divided on this issue. Some believe that the Judaizers are being identified when Paul speaks of those who “live as enemies of the cross of Christ,” but has a group of professing Christians in mind when he speaks of those “whose god is their stomach and their glory is their shame,” who also “mind earthly things.” These phrases are thought to identify the antinomians, libertarians, and some heathens. Rather than referring to the heathens it seems that Paul’s own emotions of tears, and weeping would lean toward professing or erring Christians. Their destiny is destruction.

In verse 20 the emphatic position of **ἡμῶν** (*hēmōn*) shows that Paul is thinking of a contrast between the earthly minding of the heretics and the heavenly citizenship of Christians. The Greek word translated “citizen” is **πολιτεύμα** (*politeuma*), and it can also be translated “commonwealth or community.” The RSV translates this as “commonwealth” which may capture Paul’s thought better than “citizenship.” Paul may be using this in contrast with those

who “mind earthly things,” as if to say, “They have an earthly commonwealth, but we have a heavenly one.”

Verse 21 says that there will be a **μετασχηματισεῖ** (*metaschēmatisei*) “transformation” of **τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινωσεῶς** (*to sōma tēs tapeinōseōs*), “the body of humiliation.” The KJV translates this as “vile body” which does not capture the idea. Paul is not speaking of our bodies being vile in the common meaning of the word, but a body which is characterized by the humiliation which Christians are called on to suffer for the cause of Christ. This body will be transformed into a spiritual body as discussed in I Cor. 15:35-55.

In 4:1 Paul exhorts his beloved Philippians “that is how you should stand firm in the Lord.” He addresses them as his joy and crown. The Greeks had two common words which are translated “crown.” One was **διαδῆμα** (*diadēma*) which means a royal crown, or the crown of a king or other ruler. In the New Testament it is used only in Rev. 12:3 and 13:1, where it refers to the crown worn by the beast, and in Rev. 19:12 where it refers to Christ’s crown.

On the other hand, the word **στεφανος** (*stephanos*), which is used in Phil. 4:1, is much more common in the New Testament. It means a victor’s crown, particularly one awarded for victory in the games. It was made of a wreath of wild olive, green parsley, bay leaves, pine, and other types of small twigs. It was also given to an honored guest at a banquet. When Christ was on trial and mocked, his accusers placed a crown **στεφανος** (*stephanos*) of thorns on his head, Matt. 27:29. In Rev. 4:4 the twenty-four elders around the throne were crowned with **στεφανους** (*stephanous*), and I Cor. 9:25 speaks of the one who wins a race being awarded with a **στεφανος** (*stephanos*). Peter speaks of faithful shepherds (elders) receiving a crown **στεφανος** (*stephanos*) of righteous which does not fade away, I Pet. 5:4. This distinction, although present in the New Testament, was not always strictly observed in secular or religious usage among the Hellenists. In various passages in the LXX this interchangeability is seen as in I Sam. 12:30 where a kingly crown was placed on David’s head. The Greek word **στεφανος** (*stephanos*) is used there and elsewhere. See B.C. Caffin, *The Pulpit Commentary: The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, p. 155, and Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp 78-81.

Final Exhortations and Gratitude

Phil. 4:2-23

Introduction:

Paul follows his regular habit of personal exhortations and greetings at the conclusion of his letter. He had a strong affection for the Philippian church, and it was one of the most problem-free churches he established. His epistle has shown this over and over. In the final chapter he exhorts two women to work out their differences, and he asks others to help them in this because they have assisted him in his work. After some final encouragements to the church he expresses his gratitude for their continued support, concluding with personal greetings.

4:2-3. “Agree with each other in the Lord . . .”

Concerning the exhortation to Euodia and Syntyche we have no information. We don't know who they were or what the nature of their problems might have been. These were common names and occur in some ancient inscriptions, but they are always feminine, not masculine. Barclay mentions that there was a tradition which grew up as a conjecture that the name Euodia was really Euodias, as in the KJV, making it a masculine name, and that Syntyche (a woman's name) was his wife. Some thought this might have been the Philippian jailer and his wife. Of course there is no evidence whatsoever for this, but it does show how the curiosity of some people caused much speculation in the second century church. It is interesting that two women had played such a prominent role in the church as they apparently did. We also know that Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) was recognized for her work in the church in Cenchrea. It was somewhat rare among the Greeks and Romans for women to have an active role in public life but it was not unheard of. There are some ancient inscriptions and monuments which give honor to women who had competed in sports and other events. Vincent shows some skepticism about the significance of these monuments and inscriptions. See Marvin Vincent, *The International Critical Commentary: Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, pp. 130-131.

In verse 3 Paul speaks of someone as a “true yokefellow” (KJV, ASV, RSV, NIV). The NRSV translates this as “loyal companion,” and the NEB as “loyal comrade.” The phrase which Paul uses is **γνησιε συζυγε** (*gnēsie suzuge*). The word **συζυγε** (*suzuge*) is thought by some commentators to be a woman's proper name, although the form would have been a little

different. This is shown as a reading in a few manuscripts, but the manuscript evidence for it is very weak. H.A.A. Kennedy believes this is a possibility (H.A.A. Kennedy, *The Expositors Greek Testament: The Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 465.) Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 190) considered the possibility that this may have been Paul's wife. A wide variety of speculative identifications have been propounded throughout the ages. G.F. Hawthorne lists nine different individuals who have been subjects of these speculations. (See Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*. Vol. 43, on CD, on this reference.) Paul asks this "true yokefellow" to assist these ladies, Euodia and Syntyche toward reconciliation because they had helped him in his own work.

Mention is also made of Clement as a fellow worker with Paul. In Rome, during the last part of the first century there was a very active Christian by the name of Clement who is referred to by Irenaeus (A.D. 135-200) as the Bishop of Rome from A.D. 92 until his death in A.D. 101. He is considered by Roman Catholics to have been the third pope, although there was really no such office as pope until centuries later. Some have attempted to identify Clement of Rome with the Clement mentioned in Phil. 4:3, but since this was a very common name, there is no real evidence to substantiate this. The Clement of whom Paul speaks was probably a Christian in Philippi, not Rome, and probably helped Paul while he was in Macedonia, not in Rome. This supposed identification goes back to Origen (A.D. 185-254), but was abandoned almost entirely by the late 1800's.

"Whose names are in the book of life." This expression is not found in the New Testament except here and six times in the book of Revelation. Many ancient cities had civic registers in which were kept the names of the citizens of the city. Paul's reference here may have been a familiar idea to the Christians at Philippi. We can link this to 3:20 where Paul speaks of our citizenship (commonwealth) being in heaven. This phrase is used in the Old Testament, and also in rabbinic writings.

4:4-9. "Do not be anxious about anything . . ."

After once again touching his keynote "rejoice," in verse 5, Paul offers encouragement for the Philippians to let others see their *επιεικες* (*epieikes*). That is, let people see your "reasonableness, meekness, gentleness, mild-mannered character, moderation, or flexibility." This is a good Greek word, but Hawthorne says it is almost untranslatable, because there is not an exact equivalent word in English. He says that in classical Greek Aristotle contrasted it with *ακριβοδικαιος* (*akribodikaios*) meaning "strict justice." Paul urges the Philippians not to be severely judgmental, or unduly rigorous. Instead, they were to be reasonable in their relationships with others. This should not be seen as watering down their firm stand on the gospel, but it deals with their demeanor and attitude as they present themselves to others. "You are to be reasonable people who are known for your forbearance rather than strictness of judgment." Paul uses this word in II Cor. 10:1 where it is translated "gentleness." Although he did not use the same word in Co. 3:13, the ideas are close akin. Christians are to be patient forbearing, mild-mannered, moderate, and flexible people, willing to put up with the unresolved differences they may have with others or within the fellowship. It is interesting that this injunction comes immediately after his exhortation to Euoria and Syntyche.

What does Paul mean when he says, “the Lord is at hand?” Many commentators relate this to the *Parousia* the second coming of Christ because they believe the early church, including the apostles, believed that Christ would return in their own lifetime. There is little doubt that some in the church believed this to be so, and in the second century we have a relatively strong disposition toward this. Was this something which the apostles themselves thought or taught? We must remember that Jesus himself told the apostles that no one knows the time, not even the angels nor the Son, but only the Father (Matt. 24:36). It would seem strange then if these very persons were really expecting the second coming during their own lifetime. Paul himself corrected misconceptions about the immediate *Parousia* in II Thess. 2:1-12. The word used here is **εγγυς** (*eggus*) meaning either chronologically or spatially “close by, near, or at hand.” Paul, having just said that Christians must be forbearing, moderate, flexible, etc., it is completely reasonable for him to state that Christ is close to you, *i.e.* he is not remote or far removed. You can practice your Christian life with confidence that he is always nearby. See Matt. 28: 20, “I am with you always.” He may also have in mind the imminence of Christ’s coming. That is, it could happen at any time.

Verses 6-7 form an interesting block. The Greek word used here is **μεριμναω** (*merimnaō*), which is the same word used by Jesus in Matt. 6:25, 28. It occurs frequently in the Gospels but only occasionally in the epistles. It means to have your thoughts occupied or to expend careful thought, to be troubled with cares. The noun form means a divided mind or a mind which is drawn in different directions. So Paul begins this brief exhortation by saying, “Don’t have a mind which is pulling in different directions.” Paul gives a progression: First, rejoice always. Second be forbearing toward all men. Third do not be anxious. He will draw a contrast – do not be anxious about anything, but be thankful in everything.

But how do we overcome this condition of anxiety. He gives us the answer: “In everything, by prayer and supplication [petition] with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Once again he offers us a progression of thought. First we must include everything. The tendency is to try to withhold from God certain things about ourselves. God’s peace does not come when we are less than honest with God. Confession may be one of the most important components of prayer, but we like broad generalities instead of specific confessions when talking to God. Second, is prayer and supplication. See 1:3-11 for a discussion of prayer and supplication. This is petitionary prayer – a prayer of request. Jesus spoke of the importance of persistent prayer in his parable of the unrighteous judge in Lk. 18:1-8. Third, Paul said we have to ask with gratitude. This is a frame of mind, a state of mind, not just being thankful that we have received a gift from God, but living in a perpetual state of thanksgiving.

So Paul admonishes the Philippians to become grateful people. The word is **ευχαριστιας** (*euchristias*) meaning simply “with thanksgiving,” and is genitive singular. This means that it is part of the mindset of Christ. In I Thess. 5:16-18 Paul says we are to give thanks in every circumstance. Notice he did not say “for everything” but “in everything.” He will address this in a personal way in Phil. 4:12-13. Asking, receiving, and gratitude are inseparably linked, and Paul will also show that peace can never be experienced without the presence of the other components of which he speaks. We might not be able to see or understand the grounds for thanksgiving, but we must learn that gratitude is based, not on what we have or possess, not even

on what we hope for, but on our trust in God. When the mindset is that of gratitude, prayer, and remembrance, anxiety and worry do not dominate one's thinking.

Verse 7 speaks of the peace of God which is beyond understanding. The expression **ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Θεοῦ** (*hē eirēnē tou theou*), “the peace of God” is found only here in the New Testament. Very close to this is the expression, “the God of peace,” which is used five times in the New Testament, one of which is Phil 4:9. Notice that this is not speaking of peace with one another or civil peace, or the absence of conflict. It is speaking of peace which belongs to God since **Θεοῦ** is genitive singular. God does not promise us life without conflict or peace with other people, although that may be a blessing which comes to us. This passage is speaking of an inward peace which can never be taken away by circumstances, deprivation, war, or strife. This implies reconciliation with God. The hostility between God and man has been erased because sin has been forgiven, and reconciliation has taken its place.

This peace is over and above our capacity to understand. The Greek word **υπερεχουσά** (*uperechousa*) means “to go above or over the top, to stand out above all else, to be higher or superior.” It is also found in Phil 2:3 and 3:8. The word **νοῦν** (*noun*) means “mind, thought, understanding, intelligent faculty, or conception.” This phrase conveys the idea that the “peace of God” can pervade every part of our being, can heal the mind, can bring tranquility and relieve our anxiety. But it requires surrender. The complexities of life, its anxieties, and its doubts can never be solved through intellect, education, or meditation. This comes only from the healing of our minds when we surrender ourselves unconditionally to God. This peace of God is so potent that it transcends all human power to understand it. We can only trust.

In 4:8 Paul uses the phrase **το λοιπὸν** (*to loipon*) which also occurs in 3:1. It is almost universally translated “finally,” but there a few commentators who believe it should be translated otherwise. See comments on chapter 3, in the previous lesson. The word can be used as a transition word meaning “as to what remains,” or “besides.” Paul uses it in this sense elsewhere. However, since he is coming to the close of this letter, it is probable that he is using the word with the potential close of the epistle in mind. An important question is whether or not Paul is linking some previous thoughts with those to come, or is he just indicating that he is about to close the letter. It fits very well if we think of this as a linking word translated “finally,” but with the idea that he is saying, “I have just told you of the peace of God, the importance of gratitude in prayer, and the spiritual healing effects of the mindset of Christ. Now, I am going to let you look more deeply into this by telling you about some things which ought to occupy your mind.” Not only is this a useful list which he gives here, but it embraces just about all of the virtues which the Gentile nations embraced as well, although they did not necessarily relate them to their gods. They were associated more with philosophy, especially the Stoics, than theology. From the point of view of the practical values of these, we cannot say that there is anything here which is unique to the Christian religion. There is enormous practical value in contemplating these virtues and qualities. Thinking on things which are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious will simply improve one’s character. Beyond these things however for the Christian, Paul links these to the “peace of God” and the value of an intimate relationship with him. We will look at some of the Greek words and their implications.

Things which are **αληθή** (*alēthē*), “true.” Truth has a moral character to it as well as a forensic dimension. It deals with the very nature of God, but this was not true in heathenism. Jesus said, “I am the truth.” Jn. 14:6. This doesn’t mean that he is just making true statements. He is the embodiment of truth because he is God in the flesh.

Things which are **σεμνά** (*semna*), “honorable, reverend, or venerable.” This word recognizes that dignity rises out of moral elevation, and to think on things which are honorable raises one’s level of moral and ethical goodness.

Things which are **αγνά** (*hagna*), “pure.” The English word has a variety of meanings and connotations. For example, some things are pure instead of being contaminated, there is purity of one’s motives, or moral purity, etc. In the Beatitudes Jesus used a different word when he spoke of the “pure in heart.” The word Paul uses is very broad, encompassing motives, life, mind, and acts. It means moral-ethical purity of life, innocent, blameless, or modest. This word comes from the same root as the **αγιος** (*hagios*) translated “holy.” Contemporary entertainment bombards us with challenges to purity on almost every front.

Finally Paul says the Philippians should “take into account these things.” The Greek phrase he uses is **ταυτά λογίζεσθε** (*tauta logizesthe*). It is a strong phrase in the imperative, meaning “to give serious thought to these things, to reckon, to account for, or to compute the value of these things.” The words may also mean “to weigh all of the reasons or to inwardly deliberate.” The imperative makes this a necessary injunction.

Paul tells them to imitate the conduct which they had observed and heard in him. We must remember that many of the earliest Christians came out of paganism, and would have had little by way of moral-ethical examples to see and follow. This was especially true in Philippi since we know that there were few Jews living in the city. This was not a statement of egotism on Paul’s part, but a very practical exhortation.

Earlier in 4:7 Paul spoke of “the peace of God.” Now he speaks of **ο Θεος τῆς εἰρήνης** (*ho theos tēs eirēnēs*), “the God of peace.” He uses this expression in Rom. 15:33, 16:20, and I Thess. 5:23. In the New Testament this expression is only found in Paul’s epistles and in Heb. 13:20. The word translated “peace” is in the genitive, meaning it is the peace which belongs to or comes out of God. This peace is not just the absence of conflict (Christians are seldom free of conflicts), but peace which comes from knowing one is reconciled to the Creator, and is living in harmony with Him. Ultimately, this can only come from God who forgives and brings reconciliation. It is characterized by complete trust *i.e.* knowing that one’s relationship with God is secure in God’s grace. Although Paul does not pursue the topic here, there is a great contrast between the peace which comes by grace through faith, and the frustration which comes when a person believes that his justification is the result of his own goodness. See Rom. 5:1. Christ is the “Prince of peace” in this very sense, but not a civil, sentimental, or psychological peace. See Is. 9:6, Jn. 14:27, 16:33.

4:10-20. “I have learned the secret of being content . . .”

Paul now turns to the matters of his personal situation and gratitude for the generosity of the Philippians. Once again he expresses his own joy. To describe the renewal of their thought for

him he uses the very descriptive word, **αναθαλλω** (*anathallō*) meaning for a plant to spring back to life, to sprout and bloom, to rise (as the sun rises), or to give birth. He hastens to say, however, that prior to this they did not have opportunity to help him. We do not know what caused this lack of opportunity. Paul was not speaking as if this had placed him in want or a state of deprivation. On the other hand, he takes this opportunity to tell them that he had learned the secret to being content, whatever the external circumstances of his life.

Paul says he has learned how to make the best of every situation, whether this means being abased or abounding, to be in want or to have plenty. The word **μεμυημαι** (*memuēmai*) is translated “learned” or “learned the secret” in most versions. It is the perfect passive of the verb **μυεω** (*muēō*) which means “to be initiated.” This word was associated with the mystery religions of Paul’s day. Anyone could join in the worship in the mystery religions, but only the “initiate” were members of inner cult. In order to vividly portray his thoughts, Paul sometimes called on unique words which would have special meaning in his culture. This is what he does here. Of course he was not speaking favorably of those mystery religions, but he chooses to use a familiar and picturesque word which all in Philippi would understand. In this very special way he describes his thought. The passive voice was frequently used with this word. The word carried the idea of being strongly disciplined. Paul’s external circumstances did not determine his attitude toward God or toward life and other people. These were not his primary concerns. He used the word **ισχυω** (*ischuō*) meaning “to have the power or to prevail.” It is translated, “I can do” in most versions. But the power is not within Paul himself. He states that he can do all things **εν τῳ ενδυναμουντι με** (*en tō endunamounti me*), “in [through] the one who empowers me.” The key word here is **ενδυναμουντι** (*endunamounti*). It is a compound word made up of the preposition **εν** (*en*) and **δυναμις** (*dunamis*) meaning “power within,” or “one who gives power.” This whole phrase is very strong. We can paraphrase this as Paul saying, “I have the power to prevail in any circumstance because the one who lives in me imparts this power to me.” The word “Christ” is not in the Greek, but it is obviously implied in Paul’s statement. It appears in the KJV.

In verses 14-20 Paul shares his past experiences with the Philippians. Early on, when he was leaving Macedonia, only the Philippian church gave him support. In II Cor. 8:1-7 he wants to stimulate the Corinthians in their gifts so he reminds them of the liberality of the Macedonian churches. In this instance he expands his commendation to the “Macedonian churches,” not just the Philippian church. However, to the Philippians he says that in the beginning only they were assisting him. Even when Paul left Philippi and went to Thessalonica the Philippians sent aid again and again. He is not speaking in reference to any present need, although he is grateful for the gift they had sent by way of Epaphroditus.

Verses 21-23 give Paul’s personal farewell and final greeting from “all the saints” who were with him, “especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.” This expression was broad and general, and was not limited to Caesar’s family or kindred. Instead, it referred to those people who were connected to the imperial palace. They may have been managers, servants, dependants, or even slaves.

His final statement is that “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

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